

**THE FAIRFAX AREA AGENCY ON AGING PRESENTS
CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE
MAY 2005**

Caregiver's Corner Online is an electronic newsletter produced by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (AAA) with funding from the National Family Caregiver Support Program of the Older Americans Act. Our goal is to send you information to support you as a caregiver for an older adult.

IN THIS EDITION:

1. Celebrate Long-Term Living!
2. Question from a Family Caregiver
3. Home Safety Information
4. Caregiver Seminar:
Home is No Longer an Option - Now What?
5. Previous Editions of Caregiver's Corner
Online are Available

1. MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Older Americans Act of 1965, which was created to improve the welfare of older adults. The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) was added in 2000 to provide a variety of services to assist family caregivers. This year's theme is Celebrate Long-Term Living! During the last century, the average American lifespan almost doubled. Older Americans are living longer, staying healthier and remaining more active and engaged in their communities. Maintaining health, happiness and community involvement requires thoughtful planning, wise choices and the development of good habits. Learn how to make the most of your later years by visiting the U.S. Administration on Aging's Web site at www.aoa.gov.

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2. COMMON QUESTION FROM A FAMILY CAREGIVER. The Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (AAA) frequently receives e-mail from caregivers inquiring about services available for an elderly parent. The following is a typical scenario with a response from Betsy Pugin, Eldercare Coordinator at the AAA.

Question: My mother is becoming increasingly frail and there is no other family here. I work full time and have been feeling stretched to help meet all her needs. Can you highlight some services that are available for such seniors and their caregivers?

Answer: First, I would suggest you consider talking with your mother and her physician about your observations. Perhaps there are some simple tests that could help determine if there is a medical condition that can be treated. Then, talk with your mother about what it is she needs and what she calls you to assist with. Make a list. Perhaps she needs help with shopping, transportation to medical appointments, laundry and housekeeping. You may have concerns about her ability to keep up with her own personal care, for example someone to safely assist when she bathes. When the list is made, determine what you are able to do. Perhaps you can help with shopping on weekends, and do laundry while you visit. There are some transportation options that may assist with getting your mother to the doctor. Perhaps you can arrange for her to be transported and then meet her at the doctor's office, so you do not have to take extra time off from your job to pick her up. For other needs, there may be services she can consider hiring. There are many companies that do cleaning. Check them out and compare. Ask neighbors who they use and whether they are satisfied. You also asked about services for caregivers. Be aware of your own specific needs. If it is important for you to have a weekend day for you and other family members to be together, try to carve out that time. Save the other day for Mom.

A support group is a wonderful opportunity to be with other people who are providing care. You can learn how they are dealing with care issues, and make friends as well. Both male and female caregivers report a great sense of relief when they come to a support group and find people they can talk to without feeling burdened or guilty.

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Be prepared to have a task on hand if someone offers to help. If you just say, "I will let you know if I need help," you probably never will. Instead, ask if a church member can occasionally provide a ride to services. Or let a neighbor pick up some items from the store mid-week when you can't get there. Allow them the satisfaction that comes from helping a friend.

See if these suggestions help your mother feel more stable at home. And remember to check her home for hazards like area rugs that slip or phone cords that hang down and can trip her. (See the following article). If you need information about accessing care, call one of the Aging Information Specialists at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, at 703-324-7948.

3. HOME SAFETY INFORMATION FROM AN OCCUPATIONAL

THERAPIST. A suggestion at the end of the previous article was to check mom's home for hazards and ways to increase safety. This article includes information from Anne Morris, EdD, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist Consultant to Fairfax County.

Question: My mother is moving in with me and our house probably needs some adaptations for her safety. I worry about her falling or hurting herself when bathing or cooking.

Answer: First, talk to your mother to get a clear idea of what is in her daily routine. Older adults tell me how problematic arthritis and post stroke weakness can be. If painful joints are symptoms, they often experience restricted arm and leg movement. Opening a door or turning on a faucet with a round knob is difficult. Stepping in and out of the tub, or over the shower stall curb, can make them feel at risk for losing their balance. Strategies, such as using assistive products, can help conserve energy and make the tasks easier. There are assistive devices on the market which eliminate the need to turn the knob of a door or faucet. Door handles with levers, rather than round knobs, are very helpful. A simple device, a ridged rubber cap, can be placed over a faucet knob, making it easier to grasp and turn.

Faucets activated by a tap or an infrared detector start to flow with no turning

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involved, and can be easily installed on the end of a spigot. In the bathroom, assistive products can increase safety. Allowing someone to bathe while seated can also help conserve energy. Use a bath bench designed for bathing, not a plastic outdoor chair, which can slip and slide in the tub or shower. Two wall grab bars are needed, along with a hand-held shower. A 70-80 inch shower hose with shower head that has an on/off water control button works best. In some kitchens, a cook may use an older stove model. This "at risk cook" may reach across burners to access knobbed controls on the back wall of a stove. This is an invitation for disaster. Promoting use of a microwave can increase safety. In some cases, an older adult may benefit from a home visit by an Occupational Therapist, to determine safe measures for the individual to either live alone or in the caregiver's home. Talk with the person's physician to request orders for a consult visit from a professional who can evaluate the home for safety. For more information on safety and assistive devices, check out these resources:

--www.abledata.com

--www.enablemart.com

--www.dynamic-living.com

--Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS): 1-800-333-7958 (VATS in Northern Virginia), www.kihd.gmu.edu/vatsnorth/index.htm; 1-800-552-5019 (VATS in Richmond), www.vats.org

--Fairfax County Disability Services Planning and Development - 703-324-5421, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dsb/

--The Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority, 1-866-835-5976, www.atlfa.org.

If you need further information, please call an Aging Information Specialist at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging, at 703-324-7948.

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3. CAREGIVER SEMINARS. There is just one seminar left in the Spring Series of Caregiver Seminars sponsored by the Fairfax Caregiver Seminar Consortium (FCSC). The topic is: "Home is No Longer an Option - Now What"? It will be held on Tuesday, June 7th from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at the Herndon Senior Center, 873 Grace Street, Herndon. The speakers are: Karen Love, founder and chair of Consumer Consortium for Assisted Living (CCAL) and Bob Eiffert, Director of Senior Housing with the Department of Housing and Community Development. To register please call 703-324-5205 or TTY 703-449-1186. For directions call 703-464-6200.

4. PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF CAREGIVER'S CORNER ONLINE NEWSLETTER ARE NOW AVAILABLE. Current and past editions of the Caregiver's Corner Online newsletter (November through April 2005) are available online at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/aaa/caregivers_corner_nl.htm.

****Please note that these items are included for informational purposes only and do not imply endorsement by the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging or Fairfax County Government.**

For further information, please contact an Aging Information Specialist at the Fairfax Area Agency on Aging (telephone: 703-324-7948; TTY 703-449-1186 or e-mail: fairfax_aaa@fairfaxcounty.gov). Visit our website at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/aaa.
